DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 126 505 CS 202 836

AUTHOR Kregor, Karl H.
TITLE A Zen Approach to Campus Media Centers for Teachers of Literature.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 6p.; Paper presented at the National Meeting of the College English Association (Atlanta, Georgia, April 12, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Audiovisual Communication; *Composition (Literary); Higher Education; Literary Criticism; *Literature Appreciation; *Multimedia Instruction; *Nonverbal Communication; Teaching Methods; *Verbal Communication

ABSTRACT

Experience gained in a Trinity University workshop conducted during the summer of 1972 has shown that, through the creation of multimedia interpretations of poems and stories, students' literary skills, as well as their sensitivities toward and respect for language, can be enhanced beyond the levels attainable through traditional lecture formats. Each of the following steps for creating multimedia productions--emphasizing the complementary aspects of verbal and nonverbal modes of communication--includes the writing of an explanatory essay: selecting a congenial author; choosing a literary piece suitable for presentation; reading the selection aloud and editing where necessary; searching for visual and aural materials important to the interpretation; and coordinating, rehearsing, and presenting the material. Effective, taped productions can have wide campus use and serve a variety of purposes. (JM)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

ED126505

A Zen Approach to Campus Media Centers for Teachers of Literature

(An address delivered to the national meeting of the College English Association, Atlanta, Georgia, April 12, 1975)

Karl H. Kregor

The video-tape we will see in a few minutes is the outgrowth of a summer '72 Trinity University workshop called "Extra Literary Approaches to Literature." In it the class discovered its insensitivity to the sensuous reality which lies behind most words. Students' vocabularies are often merely "book learned," not acquired through felt experiences. In the workshop, students put together for each other experiences with pure colors, sounds, tastes, smells, textures, and kinesthesia (i.e., lifting weights, a tug of war). They also discovered psychological dimensions to their sensuous experiences and came to understand how social contexts and conditioning can control whatever value judgements we might make of sensuous experiences. Their exercises confirmed the power latent in non-verbal modes of communication, but they had also come to see the possibility of working from words-as-signs back to the experiential world from which the words had arisen. It was with the goal of creating a brief "experiential reality" that we moved on to the detailed study of literature and the actual production of multi-media presentations.

Here is where my concern for the survival of literary studies met some kind of test. Enrollments in traditional literature courses has been dropping, and a reason might that Ph. D. trained professors have lost some sensitivity to the life behind the words in works of fiction. There is often a gap between professors and students because what the professor sees as interesting in a work is often far removed from what the student sees. Many students are semi-literate, but that does not mean "half-empty." Their literate weaknesses are

CS 202 856

balanced by visual and auditory accuity, sharp perceptions of change, and sub-conscious sensitivities to pace. Thousands of hours of television and film have "ripened" them for us: now it is our job to help them understand intellectually what they know implicitly. Now, if professors have not lost their sensitivities to literature because of research training, then perhaps their methods are failing to teach that fiction is not only a set of structures but also a craft through which an experiential world lies waiting to be lived. Finally, non-verbal modes of communication enjoy, and properly so, great respect among students; and verbal modes have limitations which teachers often fail to acknowledge. Verbal and non-verbal modes, however, must be seen as complementary and reinforcing, not as mutually exclusive. And students who have the chance to produce other-than-written responses to literature come to deepen their respect for the sensory stimulating power latent in words.

Here are the steps involved in such productions:

1. The student selects an author from the many he's read and explains in an essay why he feels the author is personally congenial.

2. The student then selects poems, a play, novel or story which she sees as suitable for a multi-media presentation.(For plays, novels, and stories, she is to choose scenes, chapters, or specific incidents. She may also trace a theme which recurs throughout a work.) Again, she explains her choice in an essay which also includes an analysis of the selection's appeals to sight, sound, rhythms, textures, and kinesthesia.

3. The student then reads his material aloud (an act which soon sharpens his narrative skills), to see if it fits within a ten to fifteen minute time-frame. If it does not, then the student must edit the material. This editing is a key component in the marriage of literary study and the production because the student must define for himself the author's style and then justify his editing procedure. The student eventually comes to understand his author's unique use of sensuous imagery, diction, sentence rhythms, themes, and overall rhetorical organization. Then the student must explain why his textual deletions do not violate the spirit of the author's work.

4. Next, the student searches for visual and aural materials which will contribute to her interpretation; and, again, provides a written rationale for her selections.

5. Finally, the student co-ordinates his material, assembles whatever help he needs (from classmates to media center staff), rehearses and modifies his materials to a point of readiness. The formats of the presentations will be a varied as the students themselves. In the workshop, presentations (none of which were graded), were as simple as live readings over taped soundtracks; as elaborate as taped soundtracks, stereo-recordings, slides and posters all working at once to create an environment of the room itself; as elegant as an impressionistic mime-ballet and recitation of Dada poetry (including music and incense) both handled by the costumed student; and as weak as one in which the visuals were disorganized, the material untimed and

uncoordinated. However, this last experience had great meaning for the students, particularly those whose presentations were due on following days. Within the darkened room, amid the unedited narration and the dead pauses to operate a clumsy opaque projector, the chaos was the message. After each presentation the class discussed the production's strengths, weakness, and the extent to which the literary core material was enhanced or complemented. All productions required a final essay, reflecting the feelings of the producer and observations on the production process as a whole.

Applications:

Effective productions which have been taped can have wide campus use and serve several large purposes. In traditional lecture-discussion classes they can serve as teaching stimulators. Since they would be approximately fifteen minutes long, they would serve to high light specific literary issues, themes, and symbols. Because they reflect the personalities of their producers, the productions will also stimulate discussion on critical approaches to literature and the question of an interpretation's "validity." For a department, tapes of productions could form a library of materials for faculty members to use to vary teaching techniques. Further, since productions would grow out of a teacher's specific needs within specific courses, they would become regular adjuncts to his work, and not an expense incurred for a commercial product that was found to be unsatisfactory and unreturnable. Students could experiment with productions to teach writing and research skills. Successful ones could then be viewed by students at their leisure after being checked out of the Department's library.

Within a school, productions can act as catalysts to promote inter-disciplinary work. Faculty members would seek each other out in order to acquire more expertise than they themselves had for the sake of a project at hand. In return, faculties would be more likely to see themselves as resource persons, complementing each other's discipline, not reluctant participants in someone else's idea. Through such contacts new courses will evolve in time, particularly between media studies and the humanities.

In short, the workshop experience has removed whatever skepticism I had about non-literary media having something to offer traditional literature courses. In creating multi-media presentations based on literature, students are carried into language and its complexities more intimately and with greater personal conviction than by any professor's declarative statements, no matter how sincerely expressed. If this paper seems an elaboration of the old adage "we learn by doing," I'll say yes, but that what is learned is an attitude, habits of thinking which pay attention to details, which respect the personal feelings stimulated by the literature, and habits of expanded sensitivity which lead to an assertive position--an interpretation--in which details are perceived as having informed patterns. Students in the workshop affirmed that their creations of multi-media interpretations of poems and stories had enhanced their critical skills beyond the levels they had reached in traditional lecture formats and had increased their respect and sensitivities regarding the latent affective power inherent in language.

Karl T. Kregor
Trinity University
San Antonio, TX 78284